July 26, 1972

Dear Dr. Wecht,

Thank you for your letter of July 20. I would like to respond to your letter at some length and I intend to be perfectly candid with you. As you may have learned from Sylvia Meagher, I am not enthused that you intend to examine the pictures and X-rays with the consent of Burke Marshall under the provisions of the government "contract." Although I am not in a position to know every side of the story, it has appeared to me that you have approached the matter of your gaining access in a very careless manner. To my knowledge, you proceded to seek access without consulting or seeking the advice of anyone who is truly knowledgable about the autopsy and related subjects. To be more specific, I believe you are aware that one man has done more work on and has a greater understanding of the autopsy than any other "critic," Harold Weisberg. To my knwoledge, you did not consult Harold in any capacity at any stage of your latest effort.

As I think you are aware, you are not an expert on the assassination. You are an expert in forensic medicine. It is in that capacity that you have been and can be a great help to the "critics" of the Warren Report. But I think we all have an obligation to respect our limitations. There is no question in my mind that you are more than qualified to view the pictures and X-rays. But I must question whether you are entirely competent to understand the significance of that evidence and its treatment by the government. Before you sought access th this material under the terms of the contract, I believe you had an obligation to ask yourself a number of questions, e.g., Can the "critical community" be hurt by honoring this contract of dubious legality? Are there any reasons why I should not seek access under the contract? Is there a better way to seek access? If you were not equipped to answer these questions, I think you had an obligation to seek the advice of those who were competent to assist you. In this respect, I find it reprehensible, whatever your personal relationship with Harold, that you did not discuss the matter with him, especially when you knew of the legal actions in which he was involved and which he planned.

So, I ask if it isn't a little late for soliciting "words of caution," as you do in your letter to me. No "words of caution" at this point will undo the past.

On a pragmatic basis, neglecting whatever arguments can be made that your seeing the pictures and X-rays now might do irreparable harm, I really think there is no constructive purpose to be served by examining this material now. As you well know from the briefing Harold gave you prior to your 1969 testimony, the Clark Panel report destroys the autopsy and Warren reports. So, you really don't have to look at the photographic material to be able to say that. As for making the public aware of this, why is 1972 any different than 1969? The press was there in great swarms as it has never been when you gave your testimony in Judge Halleck's court. Was there any headline, and decent coverage by any major media to tell the public what was disclosed in open court? To my knowledge there was not. I hope you do not expect a change in the media attitude in 1972 that will suddenly give great prominence to the finding that the official story is destroyed by the pictures and X-rays. So my "word of caution" would be that if you are not lucky enough to be ignored by the media, they will tear you apart. And Lord knows there is fodder for their cannons.

What else <u>can</u> the pictures and X-rays do besides destroy the official story, as we already know they do. There is a chance they might give weight to the already abundant proof we have the shots originated from more than one direction.

But that will tell us no more than what the Parkland doctors told us on the day of the assassination or what the Zapruder film shows beyond question to anyone who sees itsin motion. Because you are an expert in forensic medicine, I certainly don't have to tell you that this material is not going to show who pulled the trigger, or how many did. It is not going to exculpate Oswald from the assassination. Surely you remember Lattimer's nonsense and your criticism of it.

There is a political context to the President's murder and its official cover-up which few of the critics have been willing to reckon with, for a variety of reasons. There was a political reason for drawing up a contract for which there was no legitimate need and which is blatantly illegal. There was a political reason for letting someone the likes of Lattimer in to see this material. There was a political reason for appointing someone the likes of Burke Marshall, who has done everything he can to hurt the Kennedies, to represent the Kennedy estate. And there had to have been a political reason for giving you access not seven months ago, but now. Anyone with the slightest knowledge of the case must know the deviousness of the actions of the executive branch in dealing with this case. As "critics" we may cherish a thousand platitudes about "truth," and with the noblest motives we may endeavor to "tell the truth," but we must recognize that we do not exist in a vacuum. We, who are powerless, are up against the executive branch of the government, which has all the power and the media and which has used both against "us" and against the truth. Believe me, nothing changed when you sought and were belatedly given access. But the "political context" demanded that you procede with the utmost cuation, and to my knowledge, you have not.

I know that many who argue that no harm can come from your examination have a highly moralistic but factually unfounded desire to "get" the Kennedy family. This distresses me becaase, although I have no desire to spare the family the blame it might deserve for its lack of scruples, I do not want the falsehood perpetrated that the Kennedies suppressed the material you are about to see. If you are not aware of the facts behind my assertion, they have always been available to you from Harold. It is not my fault nor Harold's fault that those who claim to worship the "truth" often refuse to seek it where it might disturb their personal grudges and hang-ups. And the real issue is not that the Kennedies will be blamed but that the guilty ones will be let off the hook. This has been in the works since the time of the Commission, and you have had every opportunity to learn of it from Harold, even if you might disagree with some of his interpretations.

I hold what is apparently another minority opinion in thinking that neither I nor any other critic can help you in your effort. No one has to teach you forensic pathology. Yopuneed no other qualification to look at those pictures and X-rays and interpret them. If you knew nothing about the case, with your expertise you could still look at this material and tell what it shows. You know enough about the assassination to go further and say that this material disproves the official theory of the murder. So, if you feel the need to be "briefed," I would suggest that you read (a) the autopsy report, (b) the testimony of the autopsy doctors, (c) the medical discussions in the Warren Report, and (d) the two reports released in January 1969 by Ramsey Clark.

You have solicited my suggestions. Immediately after speaking with Sylvia about a month ago, I prepared a list of questions for you to consider in making

your examination. According to my conversation with Sylvia, I was expecting a call from you within a matter of days. Not having heard from you, I put my questions aside. As I thought this over prior to receiving your letter, I realized that if a man of your qualifications needs the guidance of the questions I wrote, he has no business seeing this material in the first place. I firmly believe that there is nothing any critic can do which will make your examination more competent or responsible. Thus, it seems to me that the idea of "briefing" you is pointless. At any rate, no briefing can have any bearing on press treatment of you and the possible harm that may result from your examination.

As for suggestions, I note that you intend "to review various other items in this case located at the Archives" when you are shown the pictures and X-rays. For this reason you anticipate a two-day examination. If by "other items" you mean Commission Exhibits such as the rifle and bullets and the films, my suggestions would be that you do not waste your time flogging dead horses. If you have not seen these items before, now is not the time to do it, especially when you will need all the time you can to competently examine the autopsy material. Do you expect to gain anything from seeing these items that has not already been found? Certainly, you will not have near enough time to even begin an analysis of the motion pictures, such as the Zapruder film. Besides, the day for that kind of work is long past.

Another suggestion would be that you make sure each print shown to you has a negative, and compare them to make sure that you are seeing the best print that can be made from the negative. Also, because the means by which you were given access makes it possible for you to see only what is listed in the appendix of the contract, you should make sure that you are shown everything listed in that appendix, including extra prints and film envelopes. You should also check to see that everything listed in the inventory of the Clark Panel Report is shown to you. It would also be helpful if you prepared a list of all the pictures and X-rays including the following information: (1) color or black and white, (2) size of the negative or transparency, (3) number of prints, (4) the exact view depicted, (5) qulaity of prints and negative. As you may realize, there is autopsy material other than what is listed in the appendix, but the Archives is under no obligation to show this to you if they [illegible] it and it is classified.

I'm afraid that I don't believe it is a good idea to attempt to "digest" the autopsy materials by meeting with "any knowledgeable critics." I think our opinion of which critics are "knowledgeable" is at variance and, to be frank with you, there are several "critics" with whom I would not want to discuss the medical evidence. If you would like to discuss the pictures and X-rays with me after you have made your examination, I would be quite willing to do that, provided you are willing to accept confidences where I do not wish my research to be passed on to other persons.

In closing, let me repeat that I fear the government has a great evil in the planning and you are to be part of it, even if you are but an unwitting accomplice. Only Harold and I hold such a view, and we are a lonely minority

among a group which seems blinded by the naivety that the great headlines which failed to materialize every time the truth was told in the past will suddenly appear now. My view is that this is all wishful thinking and worse, and it ignores the realities with which the critics have had to live. But, to be honest with you, if you unwittingly assist the government in its effort to falsify history, you remain uninformed because you chose to be. Ask yourself a simple question: Have you sought the advice of any responsible critic whose beliefs were not the same as yours on the matter of your requesting access under the contract?

I have been the unfortunate wwitness to a distressing amount of plain' nastiness among the "critics." So, I say to you to avoid what has too often happened, nothing I have said was meant to be personal. I prefer to deal with issues and not conjecture about personal or hidden motives. There is an important need to be served by dissent, and all of us have to be willing to accept dissent without letting our emotions cause us to lose sight of factual issues. This applies equally to points of fact and to standards of conduct. Both can be criticized above the level of personal attacks. We are in strong disagreement on this issue. I have to respect your position and accept your choice of action, and I think you have the same obligation with respect to mine. I am quite willing to discuss this matter with you if you so desire. I am of limited means and I cannot travel without usually great inconvenience (I do not drive). However, you are welcome to visit me or call. My home numbers are (area code 215) 673-4423 or 676-3978.

Sincerely,

Howard Roffman